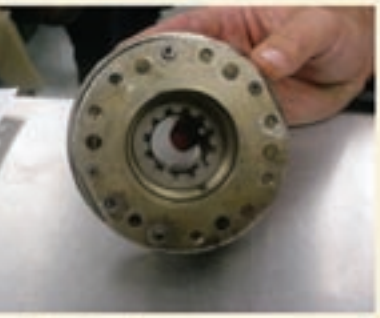
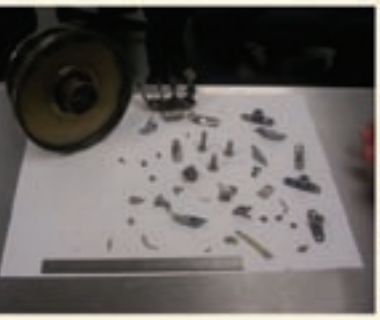
Failure Under Pressure

By AD2 R. Vasquez-Martinez

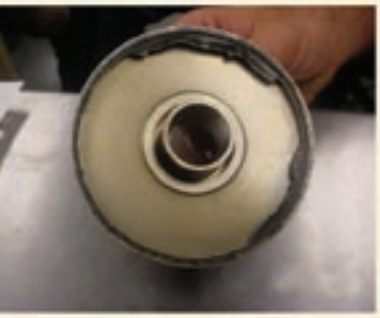




A PTS shaft separating at high speed can cause significant damage. These parts show some of the effects.

We were preparing for a month-long Fallon deployment during a short IDTC. We had a large personnel turnover after finishing our 10-month deployment aboard USS *Abraham Lincoln*. Everyone was trying to make up time with their families and to get aircraft ready for Fallon. The pressure was on, and it was about to blow.

The mechs removed aircraft 311's port engine for planner and estimator (P&E) work right after cruise. It had been two months since we had worked on this jet, and now my job was to get the aircraft ready for our upcoming detachment. The job fell squarely on my shoulders because I was the only CDI in the workcenter. The new motor was installed, and we went to QA for the in-process inspections. They were short of people because three of six QARs had made chief, and those QARs were tied up with "advancement duties." We were told the in-process on the power transmission-shaft bolts would have to wait until a QAR was available.



Realizing more work needed to be done, I told my guys to continue installing the shaft, and we would complete the final torque when QA was available. At shift change, I noted in the passdown log that the inspection still was required before the maintenance action could be signed off.

Over the next couple of days, that aircraft was turned twice, but other maintenance problems interrupted the full checks. It now was time for the flyoff, and the maintenance-control chief asked me why the MAF had not been signed off. I looked over the engine installation carefully for one final review, found no problems, signed off the VIDS/MAF, and continued with other business.

On the following Monday night, I heard about a problem with aircraft 311. A supervisor told me the power transmission shaft had sheared and parts were blown through door 64. Additionally, the gears on the accessory-gear drive were sheared, and the airframe-mounted accessory drive was damaged.

A thorough investigation found the PTS bolts never were torqued properly. A clear breakdown in communication among the workcenter, maintenance, and QA had occurred. This incident did damage the aircraft, but it could have been tragic.

I learned that everyone needs to stay focused on each task, and we must not let pressure to meet the flight schedule push us into a mishap. The damage was minimal, but I know there can't be a next time because we might not be so fortunate.

Petty Officer Vasquez-Martinez works in the power-plants shop at VFA-113.

"World-class organizations do not tolerate preventable accidents." –Donald Rumsfeld, SecDef